

June 8, 2000

Honorable Wayne L. Peterson
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of San Diego
330 West Broadway, Executive Office
San Diego, California 92101

Re: District Response to 1999-2000 San Diego County Grand Jury Report –
“San Ysidro School District Six Years Later.”

Honorable Presiding Judge Peterson:

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933, subdivision (c), the San Ysidro School District (“District”) hereby comments on the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury Report, dated May 9, 2000, and submits such comments for your consideration.

As to each Grand Jury finding, the District indicates as follows:

Finding 1: The primary language of 87 percent of the student population of the District is Spanish.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 1.

Finding 2: The District has changed from the maintenance mode of bilingual education to the transition mode.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 2.

Finding 3: The District has started a preschool program that encourages English proficiency.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 3.

Finding 4: Student test scores remain among the lowest in the State.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 4. Please see Findings 5 and 6 for additional relevant information.

Finding 5: There has been improvement in student test scores, and good reason exists to believe there will be further improvement.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 5.

Finding 6: As a whole the District's schools are above average in Similar Schools Ranking.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 6.

Finding 7: The District is in sound financial condition.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 7.

Finding 8: The District has had some success in involving parents but more needs to be done.

Comment: The District agrees with Finding 8. Please see the District's response to Recommendation 00-33 for more information.

Finding 9: There is a strong rapport between the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees that has facilitated many of the recent improvements in the District.

Comment: The District agrees that the strong rapport between the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees has facilitated many of the recent improvements in the District. The District also credits the ability of the current Board members to rise above the power struggles and divisive politics of some previous Boards, their prudence, restraint, and proactivity. The District further credits the rapport between the former Superintendent, Dr. Julian Lopez, and the Board of Trustees.

As to each Grand Jury recommendation, the District indicates as follows:

00-33 That the Board of Trustees continue to develop and implement programs to accelerate the transition of limited English proficient students to full English proficiency.

The District has taken and will take action that will implement Recommendation 00-33. The goal of the San Ysidro School District is to develop and implement programs to transition students from Limited English Proficient ("LEP") status to Fluent English Proficient ("FEP") status. To be redesignated FEP, a student must demonstrate English proficiency comparable to that of the average native speaker and be able to participate equally with native speakers in the school's English instructional program.

The District believes that it has put in place an effective English language acquisition program. Because the program is still in its infancy, the District expects to make numerous improvements to the program and its implementation, as the need becomes apparent, rather than making radical or wholesale change.

During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue to offer intersession and after-school language development classes. During the 1999-2000 and continuing during the 2000-2001 school year, each school site will have a 4th grade reading teacher on staff, whose primary responsibility will be to assist students to acquire basic reading skills in English. The District has found that many students make the transition to an English immersion program during 4th grade. These students benefit greatly from the support provided by the reading teacher in both reading and language acquisition skills.

The District Assessment Center will continue to conduct redesignation studies to determine whether students have acquired the proficiency needed to transition into English language programs. Assessment Center staff, principals and District administrators will monitor student progress and consider trends to determine how the District language acquisition program may be improved. The District will also consider possible enhancements to its programs or to program implementation, as necessary.

During the 1999-2000 school year, the District considered adoption of a language acquisition text series, but found that the series did not have a useful assessment tool. The District will adopt an appropriate series during the 2000-2001 school year. The District will benefit from the guidance provided by the English language development standards recently adopted by the California Department of Education. The State English language development examination probably will not be available before the 2001-2002 school year.

The District will continue to implement and expand its Community Based English Tutoring Program ("CBET") during the 2000-2001 school year. (Please see paragraph 2, below, for a more detailed explanation of the CBET program.) CBET participants must pledge to provide personal English language tutoring to children and school-aged limited English proficient youth. The District believes that continued expansion of the CBET program will benefit students by creating a larger pool of English language tutors.

00-34 That the Board of Trustees improve communication with the community to increase parent involvement in the education of their children.

Comment: The District has taken and will take action that will implement Recommendation 00-34, including the following:

1. The District recently submitted applications for funding related to three grants intended to increase parent involvement in the education of their children.

- a. The Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program will strengthen communication between schools and parents through home visits as a means of improving academic achievement. The award of up to \$25,000 pays for teacher participation in home visits and community meetings, training in conducting home visits/meetings, classified community liaison staff time, and student/parent information packets. All schools in the District applied for this grant for the 2000-2001 school year.
 - b. The Teresa P. Hughes Family School Partnership Grant Program will provide funds to establish and/or expand District family-school involvement programs. Schools will receive up to \$15,000 for outreach programs that encourage participation by parents of all pupils at the school site. For example, Beyer Elementary School intends to use grant funds to expand Project Sail (Strengthening Academic and Intellectual Learning – a partnership with the University of California, San Diego, the San Diego Office of Education, Southwestern College, and Sweetwater Union High School District). Beyer intends to expand Project SAIL by integrating a recreational reading program, Readerware, patterned after Tupperware parties. Readerware parties are hosted by parents for other parents in their homes or recreation rooms. The important difference is that the product promoted is not plasticware, but strategies and techniques (offered without charge to the parent participants) to help children become better readers. Beyer and La Mirada elementary schools and San Ysidro Middle School applied for this grant for the 2000-2001 school year.
 - c. The Tom Hayden Community-Based Parent Involvement Grant Program allocates a maximum of \$40,000 for schools to contract with non-profit community-based organizations to enhance parent and guardian involvement in the education of their children in public schools. The District intends to obtain the services of Family-School-Community Partnerships to recruit, train and retain traditionally low- or non-participating parents, such as immigrant and low-income parents, to become actively involved in the academic and family lives of District students. FSCP will also train District educators regarding implementation of parent involvement programs. All District schools have applied for this grant for the 2000-2001 school year.
2. The District will continue and expand its Community Based English Tutoring Program (“CBET”) during the 2000-2001 school year. Proposition 227 authorized the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to apportion and allocate funds to local educational agencies to provide free adult English language instruction for parents and other community members. Participants must pledge to provide personal English language tutoring to children and school-aged limited English proficient youth. The District contracts with the Sweetwater Union High School District Adult Resource Center, which provides instructors, training, assessment, and record-keeping services for the CBET program. CBET classes are held at Beyer, La Mirada, Sunset, and Willow elementary schools, as well as at the Villa Nueva Apartments. During the 1998-1999 school year, 100 adults enrolled in the District’s CBET classes.

During the 1999-2000 school year, 175 adults enrolled in the District's CBET classes. The District will continue to promote this program during the 2000-2001 school year, and expects moderate program growth. The CBET program has yielded the following significant collateral benefits to the District:

- More parent/community involvement in schools and with children at home
- Increased student attendance rates
- Improved student school performance
- Greater understanding of school system

3. During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue to use, and expand the use of, Parent/School Compacts, such as the compact used at Willow School. The Willow School compact states, in part:

As a Parent I will be responsible for:

- Sending my child to school regularly and on time.
- Reading or listening to my child read daily.
- Providing necessary materials to support my child's learning.
- Providing a time and place for quiet study and encouraging good study habits.
- Attending all parent/teacher conferences.
- Attending parent events and workshops.
- Reinforcing school and classroom rules.
- Making education important in my home!
- Encouraging a home visit from my child's teacher.

4. During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue to promote and participate in programs such as the South County Parent Conference, a multi-district parent conference conducted in November, 1999, at Rancho del Rey Middle School in Chula Vista. That conference included the following topics:

Drop-Out Prevention
Gang Awareness
Preparing Students for High School, Graduation and Beyond
Talking to Kids About Sex
Drug Prevention
Special Education Description of Programs, Process
Standards Based Education and Your Child
Understanding and Communication with the School System
Program Options for English Learners
Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)

5. During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue to promote and participate in programs such as the Adelante Mujer Conference 2000, held in March, 2000. The Adelante Mujer mission statement provides that the organization seeks to promote Latinas' rights to determine their own destiny through personal, cultural, academic and professional development. The conference was aimed primarily at young Latinas and their mothers. It had many workshops that assisted parents in becoming more involved in their children's education, including: "What is it like in Junior High?"; "Strategies on How to Improve Communication Between Teens and Parents," presented by Lorraine Ramirez, a San Ysidro District Outreach Consultant; "What to Do in High School to Prepare for College"; "How to Help Your Children Have Success"; and "Children's Stages of Development." The District believes that the conference was valuable for the motivation and the information provided to participants.
6. During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue improving participation in the District Advisory Council. We will do outreach through Community-Based English Tutoring Program, through school site parent meetings, PTA Council and through the SB 65 Programs and site Community Liaisons. We will also look at alternate meeting times that will best meet the needs of the parents and other motivational incentives.
7. During the 2000-2001 school year, the District will continue promoting parent and community participation through School Site Council at each school site. Although a detailed description of School Site Council operations is beyond the scope of this response, one example of a change intended to increase parent participation is described below. For the 2000-2001 school year, the principal of Smythe School will provide orientation to parents and community members regarding the roles and responsibilities of the School Site Council prior to annual Council elections. The principal will also provide a timely notice to parents and community members regarding the election process, and provide a forum in which would be Council-members may express information about themselves to parents prior to voting in the election. The dissemination of such information should make the school site council more accessible to parents and thereby encourage parent participation.

The District is very pleased that the Grand Jury has recognized the improved state of affairs in the San Ysidro School District and welcomes the Grand Jury's recommendations. Consistent with its mission statement, the District truly is committed to provide an educational environment in which all students succeed.

Sincerely,

The San Ysidro School District Governing Board

Luis Antonio Figueroa, President

Yolanda Hernandez, Vice-President

Juan M. Trujillo, Clerk

Ernestine Jones, Member

Jean A. Romero, Member